

West Nile activity on the rise

Indiana's mosquito season is not over, and West Nile virus activity continues across the state. In just the last two weeks, 32 mosquito groups in 11 counties have tested positive for the West Nile virus. On September 16, state health officials reported the death of an individual from Elkhart County who had previously been identified as a case of West Nile virus.

"It is important for people to understand that West Nile virus is still a real concern," said James Howell, DVM, veterinary epidemiologist for the Indiana State Department of Health. "We have seen a significant increase in West Nile virus activity statewide in the last 30 days."

To date, West Nile virus activity has been reported in 46 counties from all over the state, including human cases in Benton, Elkhart, and Hancock counties.

Additional evidence of the presence of West Nile virus in Indiana came in early September, when routine screening by the American



This map, located on the ISDH Web site, identifies the state's current West Nile activity. [Click here](#) for a larger view.

Red Cross detected West Nile virus in blood donated by a LaGrange County resident. The individual developed no symptoms of West Nile infection. The blood was destroyed. Since the LaGrange County resident did not develop symptoms of West Nile virus infection, that individual is not considered by state health officials to be a human case of West Nile virus.

"The fact that West Nile virus

was detected in a blood donation demonstrates the effectiveness of the screening process in helping to protect the blood supply," said State Health Commissioner Gregory Wilson, M.D. "This is simply further evidence of the presence of West Nile virus in Indiana."

The first step in screening blood donors for potential exposure to West Nile virus occurs during the health history questioning at the beginning of the donation process. The second step is for all donated blood to be screened for a variety of viruses, including the West Nile virus. Any blood that screens positive for these viruses is destroyed.

West Nile virus is transmitted to a human by a mosquito that has first bitten an infected bird. A person who is bitten by an infected mosquito may show symptoms from three to 15 days after the bite. The virus usually causes a milder form of illness, West Nile fever, which can include fever, headache, body aches, swollen lymph glands, or a rash.

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Study tests effectiveness of screensavers as teaching tool

The idea of screensavers as educational tools was put to test recently at the Indiana State Department of Health.

Fifty agency employees participated in a pilot study by the Mid-American Regional Health Leadership Institute (MARPHLI) Fellows in July.

The study, which lasted less

than three weeks, involved testing the effectiveness of screensavers as an educational tool for a public health workforce with limited time and resources, said Elizabeth Hibler, a MARPHLI Fellow and Public Health Preparedness staff member.

Participants were divided into a control group and an experimental

group. Although both groups took the pre-and post tests to measure change in knowledge, only the experimental group had the 11-slide screensaver installed on their computers for a week.

Foodborne illness was the theme of the slides, said Hibler. Various facts and protection tips

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Dental Hygiene Month highlights oral cancer

To Carmine Griffis, State Department of Health dental hygienist, the photos tell it all.

The black tongues, the sores in the mouth, and the white scaly bumps on the inside of the mouth are all signs of possible oral cancer.

According to the American Dental Hygienists' Association, which sponsors October's National Dental Hygiene Month, 30,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral cancer, and more than 7,200 will die from it this year.

It also reports that 75 percent of those cases are preventable, and 90 percent are treatable if detected early.

The Indiana State Department of Health Cancer Registry reports, 588 new cases of oral cancer were diagnosed in Indiana in 1999, and 133 Hoosiers died from oral cancer.

Oral cancer is twice as likely to strike men, according to Griffis, and it is seen more often in African Americans in general.

While oral cancer may not show up for years, there are signs and symptoms to look for, said Griffis. Numbness of the tongue, or other areas of the mouth; lumps in the soft part of the mouth; difficulty swallowing; or white or red spots, or scaly areas that last more than two weeks should all be reported to a dentist.

The Oral Cancer Foundation (OCF) reports that oral cancer mostly occurs in those over the age



State Dental Hygienist Carmine Griffis displays the screening techniques used by dentists and hygienists for oral cancer checks.

of 40. Seventy-five percent of those diagnosed with it are tobacco users, and those who smoke and drink have 15 times greater risk of developing oral cancer than others.

Griffis stressed the importance of wearing sunscreen on your lips if you are going to be subjected to prolonged sunlight – a simple, but often times overlooked preventive measure.

“It’s important to pay attention to anything unusual in your mouth that lasts more than two weeks, and/or is only on one side of the mouth,” said Griffis. “And,” she said, “be sure to tell your dentist about any symptoms you are having.”

Many times, dentists can spot problems that are related to other conditions, like cancer of the larynx or esophagus.

“The screening for oral cancer includes a very simple exam by a dentist or hygienist,” said Griffis.

Feeling of the lymph nodes, gums, cheeks, and a visual check of the entire mouth are included.

“The dentist or hygienist is

looking for lumps, or anything that is not symmetrical (located on both sides of the mouth),” she said.

If something is found, a patient more than likely would be referred to specialists.

“Treatment of oral cancer usually involves other professionals,” Griffis said.


While treatment varies according to specific cases, it can include

x-rays, biopsies, excisions, extraction of teeth, radiation, or chemotherapy.

It’s important to ask for an oral cancer exam if you are not routinely being given one,” said Griffis. “Like many other cancers, your chances of cure in most cases are good if the cancer is discovered early.”

For more information on National Dental Hygiene Month, visit www.adha.org/ndhm.

For more information on the State Department of Health’s Oral Health program, contact Griffis at cgriffis@isdh.state.in.us.

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Julie Fletcher, Editor
 Telephone (317) 234-2817
 Fax (317) 233-7873
jfletche@isdh.state.in.us
<http://www.statehealth.IN.gov>
 Margaret Joseph, Director of Public Affairs

Gregory A. Wilson, M.D.

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were included, along with eye-catching graphics.

"The screensavers slides were designed to have a concise message, to include colorful graphics, and be few in number so that the message could be repeated often," said Hibler.

The post-test results showed the effectiveness of the program.

"The results showed a 24 percent increase in average score for the experimental group," said Hibler. "

This supports the theory that screensavers could be a cost-effective and time-saving method for education of the public health workforce."

Feedback included positive comments on the method, as well as suggestions on improvement.



Photo by Dan Axler

Participants in the screensaver test program viewed 11 slides, like the one shown above, educating them on food-borne illnesses.

"We also learned that this method may not be appropriate for all types of positions, especially staff who aren't at their computers daily," she said adding that more research is needed.

MARPHLI Fellows include

Hibler, Donna Allen, Immunization; Jim Ignaut, Indiana Public Health Association; Carole Kacius, Ph.D., Indiana University; Lynette Tucker Indiana Public Health Association; and mentor Kathy Weaver, Office of Policy.

Statewide activities mark Breast Cancer Awareness month

The State Department of Health's Breast and Cervical Cancer Program will be participating in statewide events next month in observance of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

According to the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month Web site, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women aside from skin cancer. An estimated 4,790 new female breast cancer cases are expected in Indiana in 2004, and an estimated 890 female breast cancer deaths will occur in Indiana this year, according to 2004 American Cancer Society, Inc. Surveillance Research.

There are several risk factors, according to the Web site, including age, personal history, and family history.

According to Sue Percifield, R.N., director of the Chronic Disease Division, mammograms and

clinical breast exams are extremely important early detection tools, especially for women over age 40. "It is also important that all women practice monthly breast self-exams," she said.

The State Department of Health's Breast and Cervical Cancer Program is partnering with medical providers around the state to help Indiana women who meet certain age and income requirements get access to free clinical breast exams, mammograms, and some breast diagnostic tests. The program focuses primarily on women aged 50-64 for breast screenings.

Breast and Cervical Cancer Program representatives will be

participating in the following statewide activities next month:

Oct. 4

"Lighting The Way to Breast Cancer Awareness"-- The Indiana Breast Cancer Alliance lighting of the Arts Garden in Pink in Indianapolis

Oct. 9

Unity Celebration of Women at Unity Medical Center in Tippecanoe County

Oct. 13

The Second Annual Open Door/ BMH Health Center "Doc"toberfest at the Horizon Convention Center in Muncie

Oct. 19

The Family Health Clinic screenings in Washington

Oct. 20

Tippecanoe County Senior Health Fair

Oct. 22-23

Women's Health Expo at Muncie Mall in Delaware County



Strategic Planning meetings set for staff; comments encouraged

The Strategic Planning Committee will be hosting upcoming information sessions for staff to update them on the planning process. Participants will have the opportunity to make comments and ask questions on the committee's progress towards completing the agency's strategic plan.

Prior to the meetings, staff will have the opportunity to view the mission, vision, and values statements; summaries of the internal and external surveys; summaries of the Political, Economic, Social, Technical (PEST) analysis; the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportu-



nities, Threats (SWOT) analysis; and the proposed agency priority initiatives. All documents will be available on the Intranet before the meetings.

Committee members will briefly describe the documents, review the process used to compile survey results, present the proposed prior-

ity initiatives, and discuss the next steps in the planning process.

General staff sessions in Rice Auditorium include (please attend one):

◆ Thursday, Sept. 30
3 - 4:40 p.m.

◆ Thursday, Oct. 7
11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

The committee will also present at the Oct. 5 Managers' Meeting, and is scheduling meetings with the Lab staff and field staff.

For more information, contact Zach Cattell, Legislative Services, at zcattell@isdh.state.in.us.

West Nile

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"We recommend that Hoosiers avoid being outdoors during prime mosquito biting times, from dusk to dawn, when possible," Howell said. "There is no cure and no human vaccine for West Nile virus, but it can be prevented."

Health officials recommend when outdoors and mosquitoes are biting, individuals should do the following:

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothes and exposed skin; and
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants, especially from dusk to dawn.

Health officials are asking individuals to remove standing water from their property to help prevent these mosquitoes from breeding. The mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus breed in stagnant water,



Danielle Patterson, Minority Health, empties standing water from a flowerpot.

as can be found in clogged rain gutters, ditches, catch basins, and unattended pools and bird baths.

Daily updates on positive results for West Nile virus and a virus surveillance map are available on the State Department of Health's Web site, at www.statehealth.in.gov, by clicking on the link next to the mosquito image on the homepage.

— Jennifer Dunlap

The Express

ISDH teams forming for AIDS, liver walks

Interested in joining forces with your coworkers for the 14th annual AIDS Walk and Ride, or the Liver Foundation Walk?

The State Department of Health's HIV/STD division would like you on their team.

The AIDS Walk and Ride is slated for Sunday, Oct. 10 at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, and includes a 5K walk and 10K ride (participants can ride any non-motorized vehicle).

To join the ISDH team, to make a donation, or for more information, contact Lois Carnicom, HIV/STD, at lcarnico@isdh.state.in.us, or by calling 233-7050.

Team members are also needed for the American Liver Foundation Walk on Saturday, Oct. 9 at Butler University campus.

Participants can choose between the non-competitive 5K or 1K walks. For more information, contact Cindy Clark, HIV/STD, at cclark@isdh.state.in.us.